

An update on the Southern Chestnut moth *Agrochola haematidea* Dup. (Lep.: Noctuidae) in Britain

Further searches were made for the Southern Chestnut *Agrochola haematidea* in 1994 but it has still not been found away from the sites on which a strong colony was discovered, for the first time in Britain, in 1990, (*British Wildlife* 3: 112-114, 307-308, 5: 53; *Ent. Gaz.* 44: 183-203, 1993). Not a single individual has been reported amongst the migrant moths which turn up at our coasts and elsewhere. The moth was seen again in numbers in 1994 at its single site but there is some concern at the numbers of lepidopterists visiting simply to obtain specimens. Collectively, it appears that well over a hundred moths were removed from the site in 1994, probably more, and larvae were also collected.

So far the moth has sustained the collecting which has taken place, but this is not through any planning or co-operation. The latter would enable the efforts of visiting lepidopterists to be directed at improving our knowledge of moth and its distribution on the site and enable a check on numbers seen and numbers removed. Visits could be spread over the season and over the years to ensure the population is monitored rather than over-collected. The population appears to be strong at present but a continuation of unco-ordinated visits and removal of specimens at recent levels, as more collectors learn of the confidential locality, could lead to a ban on collecting this species, which would be unfortunate for all concerned.

This happened, for not dissimilar reasons, with the Sussex Emerald *Thalera fimbrialis* which was added in 1992 to the list of moths protected by the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* (*Brit. Wild.* 4: 322). The latter was seen in good numbers again in 1994 at its single site. Other species which may await discovery in Britain may prove less able to withstand similar bouts of collecting. Colin Pratt, county moth recorder for Sussex has offered to co-ordinate visits for the Southern Chestnut and to be a link with the local English Nature office who advise the landowners. His aim will be to maintain a record of the numbers seen and taken and to direct recording to maximise usefulness, to ensure that the moth becomes better understood and is not over-exploited. He can be contacted at 5 View Road, Peacehaven, Newhaven, East Sussex, Tel: 01273 586780. He will not be giving away details of the site however.

For those unfamiliar with moth collecting issues, it must be emphasised that it is the amateur collectors and recorders of moths that provide virtually all the information on the status of moths in Britain and who discover the new species such as the Southern Chestnut. The aim here is to develop a situation where the discoverers of exciting new species can feel confident about announcing their results without fear that, on the one hand, a swarm of collectors will descend on the site the following season, and on the other, that the moth will automatically end up on the protected list if it is only found on one site.

– PAUL WARING, 1366 Lincoln Road, Werrington, Peterborough PE4 6LS.